

Tobacco Use and the Health of Young People

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Division of Adolescent and School Health

Tobacco Use by Young People

- Each day in the United States, approximately 4,000 youths aged 12-17 try their first cigarette.¹
- If current patterns of smoking behaviors continue, an estimated 6.4 million of today's children can be expected to die prematurely from a smoking-related disease.²
- Although the percentage of high school students who smoke has declined in recent years, rates remain high: 29% of high school students report current cigarette use (smoked cigarettes ≥ 1 of the preceding 30 days).³
- Non-Hispanic white and Hispanic students (32% and 27%, respectively) are significantly more likely than black students (15%) to report current cigarette use.³
- Nationwide, 64% of students have ever tried cigarette smoking (even one or two puffs). Male students (66%) are significantly more likely than female students (62%) to have ever tried cigarette smoking.³
- Twenty-two percent of high school students have smoked a whole cigarette before age 13.³
- More than 13% of students report smoking cigarettes on 20 of the 30 preceding days.³
- Eight percent of high school students use smokeless tobacco (15% males and 2% females). Adolescents who use smokeless tobacco are more likely than nonusers to become cigarette smokers.⁴
- Fifteen percent of students report having smoked cigars, cigarillos, or little cigars in the past month.³

Health Effects of Tobacco Use by Young People

- Cigarette smoking by young people leads to serious health problems, including cough and phlegm production, an increase in the number and severity of respiratory illnesses, decreased physical fitness (both performance and endurance), adverse changes in blood cholesterol levels, and reduced rates of lung growth and function.⁴
- Cigarette smoking causes heart disease; stroke; chronic lung disease; and cancers of the lung, mouth, pharynx, esophagus, and bladder.⁴
- Use of smokeless tobacco causes cancers of the mouth, pharynx, and esophagus; gum recession; and an increased risk for heart disease and stroke.⁴
- Smoking cigars increases the risk of oral, laryngeal, esophageal, and lung cancers.⁵

Nicotine Addiction Among Adolescents

- The younger people begin smoking cigarettes, the more likely they are to become strongly addicted to nicotine. Young people who try to quit suffer the same nicotine withdrawal symptoms as adults who try to quit.⁴
- Several studies have found nicotine to be addictive in ways similar to heroin, cocaine, and alcohol. Of all addictive behaviors, cigarette smoking is the one most likely to become established during adolescence.⁴
- Of high school students who are current smokers, 57% have tried to quit in the past month.³



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Tobacco Sales and Promoting to Youth

- All states have laws making it illegal to sell cigarettes to anyone under the age of 18, yet 67% of students under the age of 18 who purchased or attempted to purchase cigarettes in a store or gas station in the last 30 days were not asked to show proof of age.³
- Cigarette companies spend more than \$9.5 billion each year to promote their products—or more than \$26 million a day—to advertise and promote cigarettes.⁶
- Children and teenagers constitute the majority of all new smokers, and the industry's advertising and promotion campaigns often have special appeal to these young people.⁷
- Eighty-eight percent of young smokers (aged 12-17) choose the three most heavily advertised brands: Marlboro, Camel, and Newport.⁸

Health Effects in Youth of Secondhand Smoke

- More than 6 million youth are exposed to secondhand smoke daily, and more than 10 million youth aged 12-18 live in a household with at least one smoker.⁹
- Twenty-two percent of middle school students and 24% of high school students are exposed to secondhand smoke in the home.⁹
- Those most affected by secondhand smoke are children. Because their bodies are still developing, exposure to the poisons in secondhand smoke puts children in danger of severe respiratory diseases and can hinder the growth of their lungs.¹⁰
- Secondhand smoke exposure during childhood and adolescence may increase lung cancer risk as an adult,¹⁰ and can cause new cases of asthma or worsen existing asthma.¹¹

References

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For Additional Information Contact:

CDC, Division of Adolescent and School Health
 4770 Buford Highway, NE
 Mail Stop K-12
 Atlanta, Georgia 30341-3717
 888-231-6405
 E-mail: HealthyYouth@cdc.gov